

Iranian Converts Bringing Life to German Church

Parts of Germany are among the most godless areas in the world. Polling shows that belief in God in the old communist east is only 13 percent.

But church attendance is growing, thanks to former Muslims from Iran. At the House of God's Help (Church) in Berlin, Persian converts to Christianity have doubled the size of the congregation.

"It came like an unexpected summer rain," church deaconess Rosemarie Götz said. "Suddenly new people started coming every week and asked to be baptized."

"In the beginning only five or six Iranians came. They were easy to spot and we got to know them," she continued. "And then over time they brought their friends and neighbors."

Hungry for Freedom

Germany has experienced a surge in Islam this year. Muslims conducted a nationwide campaign to give away Qurans in a country that has largely turned its back on biblical Christianity.

But Iranian immigrants, or Persians, have already experienced the darkness and oppression of Islam in their native land, and they are hungry for the freedom and joy of Christianity.

"I met a few times with friends in Tehran in an underground church in a flat and there we spoke about Jesus," one man named Michael, who attends the church, told CBN News. "We held Bible studies but sometimes without an actual Bible. And five years ago I was baptized in a bathtub."

All the Persians CBN News talked to accepted Christ in Iran

and then had to either flee or risk prison or death.

"I was going to a house church meeting when I saw police outside the flat, so I didn't go in," another church member named David told CBN News. "And later I called home and my mother said, 'The police were here looking for you.' So I knew I couldn't go home, so they helped me flee the country."

A woman named Nafiseh said it was difficult to learn about Christianity in Iran.

"Because it's forbidden when someone is a Muslim and they want to become a Christian," she said. "My husband at that time was a Muslim and when he learned that I wanted to become a Christian, he forbade me."

"It was really difficult; I had to leave my parents, so I lost my home, my family," she said.

Real Conversions?

Götz said some of the converts were surprised to find so many Germans disinterested in Christianity.

"Most of them became Christians in Iran and know more about Christianity than you would expect," she said. "They're ahead of us in a sense because they have already been persecuted for Christ and they figured out really quickly that a lot of Germans are Christians in name only. And they're disappointed that Germans take religious freedom for granted."

Some Germans are suspicious of the conversions because being baptized can help a refugee stay in Germany rather than be deported. So, Götz makes the Persian converts go through a rigorous schedule of Bible classes.

"I did suspect that some of them just wanted to be baptized so they could get their residency in Germany, but that has turned out to be the case with only a few," she said. "In fact, some of those who have already been baptized have come back to our

faith and baptism class for the fourth time.”

National Phenomena

It’s not known how many Persian immigrants have converted and joined churches in Germany, but it has become a nationwide phenomenon, and the baptisms are said to number in the thousands.

At the House of God’s Help, it has reinvigorated the congregation.

“These young, energetic, diligent Iranian Christians have brought a little revival from Iran to our congregation,” Götz said. “And I’m thankful that our members opened their hearts to them.”